

Network offers hope to terminated pastors and families

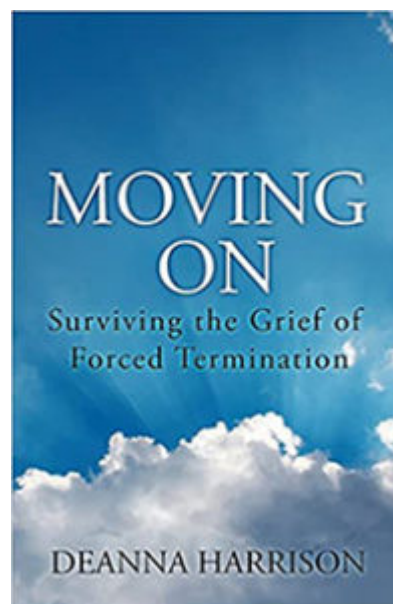
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TYLER—Deanna Harrison knows the pain ministers and their families face after being fired by a church. She and her husband learned the hard way.

In 2008, Scott Harrison—who had been a pastor more than 30 years—faced abrupt involuntary termination by the Missouri church he had served seven years. It followed what his wife characterized as “a *coup d’etat*” carried out in a two-week period.

“It was such a brutal thing to experience,” she said. “I had never felt so alone. ... I felt like I had no one to talk to.”

The pain her family experienced instilled in Harrison a deep desire that no other minister or spouse feel that sense of isolation. Several years after her husband was fired, she wrote a book, [*Moving On: Surviving the Grief of Forced Termination*](#).



“I spent a lot of time talking with pastors and pastors’ wives. You’d think it would leave me feeling emotionally drained, but I felt energized,” she said.

The response from the book was so overwhelming, Harrison sensed God

calling her to launch a ministry for terminated ministers and their spouses, and [Pastor's Hope Network](#) was born.

The network seeks to provide “hope and help for pastors in transition” through partnerships with nonprofit agencies, churches, businesses and counseling services. David Dykes, senior pastor of Green Acres Baptist Church in Tyler, serves on the network’s advisory board, and some Texas Baptist churches are listed among its partner organizations.

‘I’ll be your community’

“We’re building a network of people with skills that can benefit pastors and who have a love for ministers,” Harrison said.

“When the average church member loses a job, he goes to his pastor, to friends and maybe to a small group at church to talk about it and find support. When a minister loses his job, he loses his whole community. We’re building a network that can come alongside the minister to say: ‘I’ll be your community. We don’t want you to feel forgotten.’”

Harrison understands how devastating the loss of a ministry position can be not only to a pastor, but also to the minister’s family. In addition to her decades of experience as a pastor’s wife, she also grew up as a minister’s child. Her father, Bob Longshore, served in the stewardship office of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Looking back, Harrison noted she would have benefited from counseling in the time immediately after her husband was fired. So, one of the goals of Pastors’ Hope Network is to provide subsidized counseling for ministers and their families.

While [Texas Baptists Counseling Services](#) offers that kind of assistance to ministers in BGCT-affiliated churches, Pastors’ Hope Network seeks to

serve ministers of all denominations and those who serve nondenominational churches.

The network includes financial advisers and people with business experience who donate their services to help ministers restructure household budgets, reassess retirement options and manage money more effectively.

Not a ministry placement service

Pastors' Hope Network also helps ministers prepare resumes and find short-term employment, but it does not function as a placement service to connect ministers to churches.

"That's not our role. We're not trying to get a pastor into his next ministry position," Harrison said.

The network is not focused on making judgments about the reasons for termination. Harrison acknowledged "every story has two sides, and then there's the truth in there somewhere."

Rather, Pastors' Hope Network seeks to help ministers discover transferable skills they have used in church settings and learn how to apply them in other jobs, she said.

"We want to connect them to transitional employment—a place where they can heal and find direction before they go on," Harrison said.

Since Pastors' Hope Network launched in January 2019, it has assisted 56 ministers—25 of them in Texas and the rest in 19 other states.

Harrison noted the network not only works with pastors and other ministerial staff who have been fired, but also ministers who face premature retirement when their positions are eliminated. As churches

cope with the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, she expects their number to increase.

“We’re told some churches will be closing their doors within the year,” she said. “We anticipate more ministers who are let go for economic reasons.”

Scott Harrison—who has served mostly in interim ministry positions several years—recently joined the staff of a Denver, Colo., church. While Deanna Harrison will relocate from East Texas to Colorado, Pastors’ Hope Network will maintain its close ties to the churches and individuals in Texas who support it.

“The need is so widespread,” she said. “Our real goal is to walk alongside ministers and their families and to introduce them to a caring community of partners who can help.”

For more information, click [here](#) or contact Deanna Harrison at deanna@pastorshope.net.